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Executive Insight Brief

February 21, 2025

Notable Headlines

- [Judge warns Trump administration not to dodge court order unfreezing foreign aid](#)
- [Israel identifies remains of child hostages but says another body from Hamas was not their mother](#)
- [USS Truman Commander Fired After Collision with Merchant Ship near Suez Canal](#)
- [South Korea, US conduct exercise with B-1B bomber, fighter jets](#)
- [Layoffs begin at the IRS, as DOGE cuts collide with tax season](#)

View From The Hill

With the House out of town this week, the Senate was the only game in town. Senate Appropriations Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) threw cold water on any holdout optimism surrounding government funding, [stating](#) that negotiations on topline funding numbers with democrats “are not going well.” The current Continuing Resolution (CR) runs out on March 14th, and with congressional democrats increasingly [tying](#) their opposition to the Trump administration’s executive actions to funding negotiations, the path forward for full-year appropriations bills is looking murkier. Collins also took a [shot](#) at the Trump administration and Elon Musk’s efforts at the Department of Government Efficiency, saying that the administration’s actions blocking federal money already approved by Congress amounts to a violation of federal law and impedes on Congress’s authorities outlined in the Constitution.

The other major legislative conversation in Washington continues to center around the Budget Reconciliation process. The House and Senate GOP have each been pursuing competing approaches to move Trump’s agenda forward, with the House acting on a one-bill strategy in contrast to the Senate’s two-bill model. Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) was given a major boost in his one-bill preference this week when President Trump [endorsed](#) the House’s strategy on Truth Social. Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) decided the Senate would move forward with its own plan as a back-up, teeing up a flurry of democratic amendment votes overnight into Friday. Amidst this, some GOP Members in both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) expressed concerns over cuts to Medicaid, food stamps, and Pell Grants in order to pay for massive increases in defense and border security funding.

On the confirmation front, the Senate [voted](#) to confirm Howard Lutnick as Secretary of Commerce and firebrand [Kash Patel](#) to lead the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Meanwhile, former Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR) [faced](#) friendly fire from Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) over her previous support for the labor-boosting *PRO Act*, from which she has now distanced herself. Paul has stated he intends to oppose her nomination and that potentially several other republicans may join him, meaning she may need to rely on democratic votes to get out of committee and through the full Senate.

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) [announced](#) he will not seek reelection in 2026, making this term his last. Choosing to announce his retirement on his 83rd birthday, McConnell retains the record for longest-serving party leader in the Senate. He has recently been moving about Capitol Hill in a wheelchair, after a series of falls.

Pentagon News



The first major development coming out of the Pentagon is a directive from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, ordering senior military officials to draft a budget plan that includes an [8% reduction](#) in defense spending. This news comes as congressional republicans are pushing for at least [\\$100 billion](#) in additional defense spending over the next ten years through reconciliation. Initial reports

indicated the 8% cut as an annual reduction for five years which would equate to \$300 billion through FY2030. When it comes to the FY2026 budget, Robert Salesses, acting Deputy Secretary of Defense said the goal was to find “offsets” and to transfer at least \$50 billion to “programs aligned with President Trump’s priorities.” While previous statements from President Trump being on board with increases in defense spending, the potential cuts not “in-line” with his priorities is more plausible. There were some categories that were exempt from budget reductions including “military operations at the US border, nuclear weapons and missile defense programs, and acquisition of certain drones and munitions.” These budget cuts set up an opportunity for some closest to the president to insert their influence and begin to transform the DoD in their vision.

Meanwhile, on Feb. 18, staff from the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) arrived at the Pentagon to review lists of probationary civilian employees, a move that could lead to widespread job cuts across the Department of Defense. However, the fate of these employees remains uncertain, say officials, who suggest some will be spared due to the essential nature of their work. Each branch of the military was given until Tuesday to finalize its list of affected personnel, who are civilian workers still in their [probationary period](#)—not active-duty military, who are exempt. This latest potential round of firings follows similar cuts at other federal agencies, including the National Nuclear Security Administration, where even workers with critical responsibilities and high-level security clearances were initially let go, only to be [reinstated](#) subsequently.

The reductions are part of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's vision of trimming bureaucratic overhead while reinforcing combat soldiers, a position he reaffirmed in a [recent X post](#). The push for cuts has been linked to President Donald Trump’s broader efforts to reshape federal agencies, with Elon Musk playing a key role as a [senior adviser](#)—though Trump's recent comments have clarified that Musk is not officially leading DOGE.

Separately, ahead of Stephen Feinberg’s confirmation hearing for Deputy Secretary of Defense next week, Senator Elizabeth Warren raised significant [concerns](#) about his qualifications and potential conflicts of interest. Feinberg, co-founder and CEO of Cerberus Capital Management, has a controversial track record, including the mismanagement of investments and the collapse of Massachusetts’ Steward hospital system. Warren also pointed out Feinberg's financial ties to defense companies, which could lead to conflicts between his personal financial interests and his duties at the Department of Defense. Additionally, she questioned Feinberg’s lack of military experience and relevant government leadership. As Feinberg's nomination hearing approaches, Republicans are likely to support his confirmation, but questions over his conflicts of interest and experience could bring some scrutiny from Democrats.

Next Week's Hearings



Armed Services Committee:

House: NONE

Senate:

- 2/25, 9:30 AM - Nomination Hearing for Stephen Feinberg to be Deputy Secretary of Defense
- 2/25, 4:00 PM - Closed briefing on Department of Defense cyber operations
- 2/27, 9:30 AM - Nomination Hearing for John Phelan to be Secretary of the Navy
- 2/27, 11:45 AM - Closed briefing on global nuclear and missile threats

Appropriations Committee:

House:

- 2/25, 9:30 AM - American Indian and Alaska Native public witness day 1, morning session
- 2/25, 10:00 AM - Oversight Hearing: State of the civil works program
- 2/25, 1:30 PM - American Indian and Alaska Native public witness day 1, afternoon session
- 2/26, 9:30 AM - American Indian and Alaska Native public witness day 2, morning session
- 2/26, 10:30 AM - Federal investments in elementary education
- 2/26, 1:30 PM - American Indian and Alaska Native public witness day 2, afternoon session
- 2/26, 2:00 PM - Oversight Hearing: Federal Bureau of Prisons
- 2/27, 9:00 AM - American Indian and Alaska Native public witness day 3

Senate: NONE

Homeland Security Committee:

House: NONE

Senate:

- 2/25, 9:30 AM - Nomination Hearing for Troy Edgar to be Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security and for Dan Bishop to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget



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